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RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5720  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3435  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3299  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3963  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1399  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001231

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: NATO-SPONSORED SEMINAR FIRST STEP IN  
ENHANCED COOPERATION

REF: ASHGABAT 0741

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. NATO will hold a seminar on civil emergency planning methodology in Ashgabat, which is something of a breakthrough in its engagement with the Turkmen government. NATO's other Turkmen initiative, an assessment of a radioactive waste remediation project, is also queued up for implementation. The subject of overflight clearance for a NATO AWACS plane is being handled bilaterally by Luxembourg and would not be raised as a NATO issue. NATO has no illusions that the Turkmen government will be ready any time soon to engage more fully with the organization, but hopes its limited contacts will move the Turkmen to draw on resources offered through the Partnership for Peace. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On September 25, NATO Liaison Officer for Central Asia Evan Tracz briefed representatives from NATO-member embassies on NATO engagement with the Turkmen government. In attendance were representatives from the Turkish, German, French, British, Romanian and US Embassies, hosted by the Polish Embassy as the NATO Contact Point Embassy in Ashgabat. Tracz was in Ashgabat for meetings with Turkmen government officials and to attend the first seminar that NATO has sponsored in Turkmenistan without the joint sponsorship of another international organization. The two-day seminar on civil emergency planning methodology is to be conducted at the Ministry of Defense on September 28-29 with up to 30 participants. The seminar was proposed during the February visit of NATO Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia Robert Simmons when the Turkmen side discussed its plan to create a Ministry of Emergency Situations and represents the "soft side" of NATO. The seminar will be led by U.S. and Dutch experts, together with a NATO staffer. It will focus on how governments should respond to such crises. Tracz shared that he had limited expectations for the event, but that NATO viewed it as a first step on which to build.

¶3. (C) Regarding NATO's other initiative in Turkmenistan, a project to remediate Soviet-era radioactive waste from iodine and bromide plants in Hazar, Tracz said NATO's

Partnership for Peace had just approved offering an assessment of a Russian firm's proposal to clean-up the waste. Total cost of the assessment would be 15,000-20,000 euros. Tracz planned to offer the assessment to the Turkmen government during his meetings on this trip.

14. (C) Finally, Tracz updated the embassy representatives on the status of the request for Turkmen overflight clearance for NATO Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft. He said that following his last visit to Ashgabat (reftel), he had raised the issue of a NATO blanket overflight agreement with Turkmenistan at NATO headquarters. He was told that NATO member governments prefer to pursue overflight agreements with the Turkmen on a bilateral basis. Concerning Turkmen clearance for the Luxembourg-flagged AWACS planes, Tracz said Luxembourg wanted to handle the request bilaterally and had sent a series of incomplete and improperly filled out requests to the Turkmen Embassy in Brussels. Each had been rejected on technical grounds without being forwarded to Ashgabat. Embassy officials said the request would not be sent to Ashgabat until it was filled out correctly, otherwise they could lose their jobs. During his visit, Tracz said, he would not address the AWACS overflight issue.

15. (C) Tracz hoped the civil emergency planning seminar would lead to the Turkmen agreeing to participate in a NATO exercise, although not to actually conduct their own. He said NATO has no "grand vision" that the Turkmen government would be willing to move its partnership with NATO to the next level. Rather, the current goal is to induce the

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Turkmen to use the resources that are available to them under Partnership for Peace. While NATO is aiming "low," Tracz hoped its engagement would be thought provoking for the Turkmen. Simmons will likely come to Turkmenistan in early 2010, and that will be an opportunity for NATO to query the Turkmen government about a slightly more engaging follow-on project.

16. (C) COMMENT: Given the Turkmen government's steadfast neutrality policy, close engagement with NATO is not likely in the offing under current conditions. Still, the fact that NATO has delivered on its proposals in 2009 and has found a toehold for modest engagement shows that the process of confidence building has begun. NATO's apparent patience and low expectations will serve it well in what will no doubt be a lengthy courtship. END COMMENT.  
CURRAN